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Jocelyn van Tuyl, *André Gide and the Second World War: A Novelist's Occupation*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2006. xii + 256. \$ 65.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 0-7914-6713-9.

Review by David H. Walker, University of Sheffield, United Kingdom.

This book seeks to recount “the story of Gide’s war—and the stories Gide told about it” (p. 158). In so doing, Jocelyn Van Tuyl draws attention to a period of Gide’s career which has suffered comparative critical neglect. In 1939 the achievements on which Gide’s reputation was to rest—the novels, the denunciation of colonialism, and the demystification of the Soviet Union—were largely behind him. With the failure to bring to fruition *Geneviève*, the novel he had hoped would deal with the political temptations of the thirties, and of which only fragments were published in 1936, the writer had had to acknowledge that his creative impulse appeared to have subsided. However, his role as cultural arbiter and his reputation as a subversive moralist and astute dissector of psychological inconsistencies were at their zenith. Thus his reactions to the outbreak of war and the Occupation of France were bound to be eagerly pored over by his wide readership.

For Gide, the best form of self-expression was one which enabled him to circumscribe ambiguity: hence the form his fiction takes, providing models of severe self-scrutiny by virtue of their capacity to explore, extend and criticise the implications of a particular moral stance usually associated with a specific psychological idiosyncrasy. In the pursuit of such literary texts, he had cultivated the capacity to identify with any opinion, to allow himself to be influenced by any interlocutor, to espouse, sincerely and simultaneously, a multiplicity of contradictory viewpoints—to the extent that he was often at pains to define what his personal angle on an issue might be. The “être de dialogue” was never likely to reach a firm conclusion (pp. 26-27): and in the absence of a literary vehicle for his responses to contemporary controversies, the *Journal* became more than ever the repository for his vacillating stances.

Thus Van Tuyl’s book is chiefly concerned with the fortunes of Gide’s diary notes both as he wrote them and as he prepared them for publication. Her study focuses on six main phases of Gide’s war: the fall of France; the initial publication of texts in, then the public withdrawal from, the N.R.F. under Drieu la Rochelle’s collaborationist editorship; the “contraband” appeals to resistance disguised as grammatical considerations, articulated deftly through the dialogue form or communicated through intertexts in the *Interviews imaginaires*, published in *Le Figaro* during 1941-1942; the chronicle of spats with ‘Victor’ during Gide’s spell in Tunis, which is here read (disappointingly without reference to Naomi Segal’s interpretation)[1] as an allegory or “substitute from the military and political narrative to which Gide was denied access” (p. 88); the various avatars of *Pages de Journal 1939-1942*, published in 1944 in Tunis in *L’Arche*, in Paris in *Le Figaro*, and in New York in book form, and the role they played, along with *Thésée*, written in the same year, in “repositioning” Gide, as Van Tuyl has it, as Liberation approaches; and the reception given to Gide in the Purge and the aftermath of the Occupation. An epilogue comparing Gide’s situation with those of Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and Paul de man closes the volume.

This book is notable for Van Tuyl’s close familiarity with the richness as well as the crucial minutiae of the relevant documentation. In the Fonds Gide of the Bibliothèque Jacques Doucet in Paris, she has examined manuscripts in pursuit of *Journal* variants, has carefully consulted unpublished texts by Gide, and has combed through key polemical, critical and historical articles from Gide’s personal press archives (it is worth filling a gap in Van Tuyl’s bibliographical references by noting that very many of these latter are available on-line to the wider scholarly community at Gidian Archives).[2]

The subtleties of Gide's rewritings of his diary are traced out with scrupulous attention to detail, and very productive readings emerge. The exegesis of *Interviews imaginaires* is richly informative. At the beginning (pp. 5-7) and again towards the end of this book (p. 147), gestures are made in the direction of the "queerness" of Gide's thought and writing. Little is said, however, about the way in which, at this sensitive time, Gide's public image (as a "Mauvais Maître", for example) was affected by perceptions of his homosexuality. Equally, it would be fruitful to examine the "contraband" techniques in the texts of the *Interviews imaginaires* in the light of Gide's habit of seeking covert expression of his sexuality in works such as *Les Nourritures terrestres* or *L'Immoraliste*. Van Tuyl offers a notably perceptive commentary on the (re)structuring of the *Pages de Journal* (pp. 111-120). Occasionally the pitfalls of hindsight are not sufficiently acknowledged; the judgments passed or implied on Gide's strategies--"misleading alterations...deceptive editing practices" (p. 119) are perhaps excessively categorical or censorious. The repeated use of the word "savvy" to describe them looks to a UK English speaker like an appreciation lacking nuance.

It is not easy, *pace* the occasional disapproving comments here, to offer a comparative moral assessment of Gide's self-censorship aimed at pre-empting Nazi- or Vichy-imposed cuts and that supposedly aimed at presenting an enhanced image of himself for resisters. As Van Tuyl indicates in a note (p. 215, n. 54), certain material reinstated for the publication of *Pages de Journal* brought down considerable ire on Gide's head. An example calling for further discussion is the case of the alleged "'resistance myth' Gide would craft in his final years" (p. 132). This relates to a reminiscence in *Ainsi soit-il*, written in the final months of Gide's life, of a visit in February 1941 from Boris Vildé who brought news of the developing resistance network in Paris to Cabris, in the Unoccupied Zone (pp. 145-146). The fact that Gide delayed mentioning this till 1950 is presented as evidence of his continuing need for self-justification. But why has Van Tuyl delayed mentioning it?

As she acknowledges in passing (p. 147), its full significance emerges when it is related to earlier discussions (pp. 25-26 or pp. 47-50) on Gide's reaction to the February 1941 number of the N.R.F. containing the second instalment of his ill-judged diary excerpts alongside a second helping of unashamedly pro-German pages by Jacques Chardonne, followed shortly by a letter received in March inviting him to join Drieu's collaborationist enterprise in Paris. When the Légion des anciens combattants strong-armed Gide into abandoning his lecture on Michaux in Nice in May 1941, an article in *Le Rassemblement*, applauding this initiative, linked it to the silencing of Gabriel Péri, who had been arrested on 18 May--and who would be shot in December. This kind of contextual detail repays meticulous reconstitution, and sometimes Van Tuyl's division of her material into thematic sections prevents a full appreciation of the various dimensions of chronology--so essential when analysing the phases of what is a historical as well as a literary phenomenon.

It is true, however, that Gide was fond of repeating Renan's dictum that one can only think freely when assured that one's thoughts will have no consequences, and it is important to assess in this perspective his determination to write his diary "as if nothing were happening" (p. 28). When in January 1941 he imagines a dialogue with Hitler, this is not "fantasy and paradoxical thinking" (p. 32) (for one thing it is not very different from Camus's *Lettres à un ami allemand*, begun two years later) but a typical example of Gide's mind at work: he concludes "I understand you only too well; but to approve of you I would have to understand no one but you." Moreover from the evocation here of Hitler wielding pruning shears we should be referred not to Barrès, Maurras and *déracinement*, as Van Tuyl does, but to those pages of Gide's own *Les Faux-monnayeurs*, in which Vincent Molinier rehearses the arguments in favour of eugenics--then contradicts them by evoking horticulturalists who produced exceptional plants by singling out feeble specimens for protection. Elsewhere (p. 144), a cross-reference to this novel in respect of fraudulent conspiracies and assumed identities overlooks the more obvious pertinence of *Les Caves du Vatican*. The presentation of *Thésée* as an endorsement of De Gaulle is constructed somewhat diffidently and appears to lack conviction: "If *Thésée* represents De Gaulle...then the hero's successful exploit in Crete can stand for victory over France's collaborationist régime...If the hero's triumph in

Crete symbolises victory over France's collaborationist régime, the attitudes of those on the island represent..." and so on (pp. 121-124).

The overall aim here is to challenge what is held to be Gide's "characterisation of his political evolution as a straightforward march from 'darkness into light'" (p.1): Gide never used the word "straightforward", which is moreover a singularly inappropriate term to apply to any aspect of his work. However, Jocelyn Van Tuyl has undoubtedly shed revealing light, and brought essential documentary evidence to bear, on what she calls Gide's "Afterlife" (p.18). Her book is to be welcomed as a key landmark in studies on Gide and also, more broadly, on writers under the Occupation.

NOTES

[1] See Naomi Segal, *André Gide: Pederasty and Pedagogy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 331-341.

[2] <http://www.gidiana.net/GA.htm>

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